

THE HOME OF SHAKSPERE.



ALL that is known with any degree of certainty concerning Shakspere is—that he was born at Stratford-upon-Avon—married and had children there—went to London, where he commenced actor, and wrote poems and plays—returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried. Stratford-upon-Avon was peculiarly the *home of Shakspere*: here he was born; here he passed his early youth; here he courted and won Anne Hathaway; here he sought that retirement which the avocations of his London career would occasionally allow him to indulge in; and here, when in riper age he had won honors and fortune in the great capital, he chose to return, and pass the latter days of a life where he had first seen the light: at Stratford he died and was buried.

All that connects itself with the personal history of "the world's poet" at Stratford, is thus almost as closely condensed as are the few words quoted above, which form his biography. A day at Stratford affords ample time to visit all these places; they lie so close, that a few minutes' walk only separates them. We will, therefore, conduct the reader over Stratford and its neighborhood, minutely describing all that at present exists, and enumerating what has passed away.

SHAKSPERE'S BIRTHPLACE.

The house in Henley street, as it at present exists, is but a fragment of the original building as purchased by John Shakspere, the poet's father, in 1574, ten years exactly after the birth of his son William, the entry of whose baptism is dated in the parish register, April 26, 1564. John Shakspere had purchased in 1555 a copyhold house in Henley street, but this was not the house now shown as the poet's birthplace; he had also another copyhold residence in Greenhill street, and some property at Ington, a mile and a quarter from Stratford, on the road to Warwick. From these circumstances, a *modern* doubt has been cast on the truthfulness of the tradition which assigns the house in Henley street to be the poet's birthplace. Mr. Knight says: "William Shakspere, then, might have been born at either of his father's copyhold houses in Greenhill street or in Henley street; he might have been born at Ington, or his father might have occupied one of the two freehold houses in Henley street at the time of the birth of his eldest son. Tradition says that William Shakspere was born in one of these houses; tradition points out the very room in which he was born. *Let us not disturb the belief!*" A wise conclusion!

The original features of this house may be seen in our first view, which was taken in 1769. It was a large building, the timbers of substantial oak, the walls filled in with plaster. The dormer windows and gable, the deep porch, the projecting parlor and bay window, all contribute to render it exceedingly picturesque. The division of the house into two tenements is here very visible. The changes it has undergone since this view



was taken, will be best understood by a glance at our next two views. In 1792, when Ireland

visited the house, it exhibited the appearance given in the following engraving:—



The dormer windows and gable had been removed; the bay window beneath the gable had given place to an ordinary flat lattice-window of four lights; the porch in front of that portion of the building in which Shakspere was born was removed, and a butcher's shop-front constructed. At this time there lived here a descendant of Joan Hart, sister to the poet, who pursued the humble occupation of a butcher. The other half of the house was at this time converted into an inn, and ultimately sunk into a low public house. It had been known as the Maidenhead Inn in 1642; and when, in 1806, the house was disposed of to Mr. Thomas Court, who became "mine host" thereof, he combined that name with the one it then held of *the Swan*. About 1820, he destroyed the original appearance of this portion of the building by constructing a new red-brick front, exactly of the approved fashion in which rows of houses are built in small towns. Its present aspect is delineated as follows:—



The house is now divided into three tenements; the central one is the portion set apart for exhibition, in the back rooms of which live the proprietors; the shop, the room above, and

the kitchen, are sacred to visitors. When the lower part of the central tenement was made to serve for a butcher's shop, its window was removed, and has not been replaced; and when the butcher's trade ceased, a few years since, no attempt at restoration was made, and the shop still retains the signs of its late occupation. The old window in the upper story, originally a lattice of three lights, had been altered into one of four; and modern squares of glass usurped the place of the old leaded diamond panes. A board for flower-pots was erected in front of the window; but more recently a large, obtuse, rudely-painted sign-board projects from the front to tell us "the immortal Shakspere was born in this house." Such is its present external aspect.

Ascending the step, we pass into the shop.



The door is divided into a hatch, and we look back into the street above the lower half, and through the open window of the shop, with its projecting stall for meat, and its wooden roof above. The walls of this room are of plaster, and the solid oak beams rest on the stone foundation. On entering, the visitor looks towards the kitchen, through the open door communicat-



ing with the shop. On the right is a roomy fire-place, the sides built of brick, and having the chimney-piece above cut with a low-pointed arch out of a massive beam of oak. To the left of the door is a projection in the wall, which forms a recess or "bacon cupboard," the door of which

opens in the side of the kitchen chimney of the adjoining room. The floor is covered with flagstones, broken into fifty varied shapes; the roof displays the bare timbers upon which the upper story rests.

A raised step leads from the shop to the kitch-



en; it is a small square room, with a stone floor and a roof of massive timbers. A door opposite the shop leads to an inner room, inhabited by the person who shows the house. The fire-place here is large and roomy, the mantel-tree a solid beam of oak. Within the fire-place, on one side, is a hatch, opening to the "bacon cupboard" already spoken of; on the opposite side is a small arched recess for a chair: here often sat John Shakespeare, and here his young son William passed his earliest days. In the corner of the chimney stood an old oak chair. This relic was purchased in July, 1790, by the Princess Czartoryska, for the sum of twenty guineas. But the absence of the genuine chair was not long felt. A very old chair is still in the place; and Washington Irving speaks of one he saw in 1820.

Opposite the fire-place in the kitchen is a window, and beside this is the stair which leads into the room in which the poet was born. It is a

low-roofed apartment, receiving its only light from the large window in front. The same huge beams project from the plastered walls, one of considerable solidity crossing the ceiling. The fire-place projects close to the door which leads into the room: an immense beam of oak forms the mantel-tree.

The old furniture in this room has no absolute connection with Shakespeare. A portrait of Shakespeare, on panel, a poor performance, was brought from the White Lion Inn, a few doors from this house.

In this room the visitor, if he pleases, may sign his name in the book kept for that purpose. About 1815, the conductors of the public library at Stratford gave to Mrs. Hornby, the then proprietress of the house, a book for that purpose, the walls and windows having been covered before. Among many hundreds of names of persons of all grades and countries, occur those of



Byron, Scott and Washington Irving, the latter three times.

The most curious feature of the room is the myriad of penciled and inked autographs which cover walls, windows and ceiling, and which cross and recross each other occasionally, so closely written, and so continuous, that it gives the walls the appearance of being covered with fine spider-web.

In the adjoining public house, when Ireland visited it in 1792, was a square of glass, upon which was painted the arms of the merchants of the Wool Staple, which he considered to be conclusive evidence of the trade of Shakspero's father, who by some author was said to have been a dealer in wool. Aubrey assures us he was a butcher. Mr. Knight has clearly pointed out the likely origin of both stories, in the custom of landed proprietors, like John Shakespeare, selling their own cattle and wool. The glass has no connection with Shakespere.

In a lower room of the public house, Ireland also saw "a curious ancient monument over the chimney, relieved in plaster, which, from the date (1606) that was originally marked on it, was probably put up at the time, and possibly by the poet himself. In 1759 it was repaired and painted in a variety of colors by the old Mr. Thomas Harte before-mentioned." Upon the scroll over the figures was inscribed, "Samuel xvii. A. D. 1606;" and round the border, in a continuous line, was this stanza in black letter:—

"Golth comes wth sword and spear,
And Davd wth a slng;
Although Golth rage and sware,
Down Davd doth him brng."



We copy Ireland's engraving of this solitary fragment of the internal decoration of Shakspero's house. The bas-relief was carried away some years ago by the proprietor of the inn.

The font in which the poet was christened is here engraved. It is but a fragment, the upper portion only. The same style was adopted with



singular good taste for the new font in the church, which may therefore be considered as a restoration of it. Mr. Knight has given its history, and it is now in the possession of Mr. Heritage, a builder at Stratford. The font shown at the Shakspero Arms is reported to have been brought from the neighboring church of Bidford.

(To be continued.)